



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 6
1445 ROSS AVENUE, SUITE 1200
DALLAS, TX 75202-2733

September 12, 1996

WESTBANK ASBESTOS REMOVAL ACTION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Q: What is EPA/LDEQ doing to prevent exposure while the removal takes place?

A: Extensive dust control measures will be used during the removal action. This will include wetting the material during excavation to prevent asbestos particles from becoming airborne or windblown, and careful handling and tarping while the material is transported from the removal area to a local landfill approved to accept asbestos. LDEQ will also monitor air quality during excavation and transport, and if any airborne asbestos is detected, corrective measures will be taken immediately. Once at the landfill, the material will be safely buried.

Q: Why is EPA doing a removal now? Hasn't this material been in the area for some time?

A: EPA and LDEQ have been aware of the presence of the ACM for several years, but up to now, the material has remained stable and the asbestos was locked up inside it. However, the material is now starting to degrade, and the potential for release of asbestos has increased requiring removal of the material.

Q: Will EPA/LDEQ relocate residents while the work is going on in their yards/neighborhoods?

A: EPA will employ strict methods to prevent dust and drifting of ACM while the removal takes place, taking every possible precaution against anyone being exposed to asbestos dust during the removal. LDEQ will conduct air monitoring during excavation of ACM, and if any airborne asbestos is detected, excavation will be halted immediately. As such, there is no scientific reason for residents to leave the area or be relocated during excavation.

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Q: Why do the workers always wear protective gear if the material is not dangerous to residents?

A: The workers are in direct contact with the ACM on a daily basis as it is being removed. Unlike residents or people who don't do this type of work, they must take greater precautions to prevent any exposure since they are continuously working on sites.

Q: Does my family need protective gear? Is it safe for my children to play outside?

A: There is no need for residents to wear protective gear. The ACM does not pose an imminent threat, but is more of a future concern. However, it is best to avoid contact with the ACM if possible. Do not try to remove the material yourself--EPA will take care of that for you.

Q: How did EPA/LDEQ let this happen? Why didn't someone tell us a long time ago about the ACM?

A: As with many hazardous materials and even construction materials such as ACM, we did not know of the potential dangers back in the 1940's, 50's and 60's. We now have more knowledge of the health effects of materials such as asbestos, and we also now have laws to protect us from its use.

Q: What about the inside of my home or materials used in/on my home? Will EPA/LDEQ remove that also?

A: If building materials such as asbestos siding and roofing materials are in good condition, the asbestos is bound up and cannot become airborne, and thus inhaled. As such, these materials do not pose a risk. The asbestos is a risk only if particles are airborne and can be inhaled.

Q: Will property owners be charged a fee for removal of the ACM?

A: No. There is no cost to the property owner for removal of the materials. The costs will be paid by the federal Superfund, and if possible, the funds will be recovered from potentially responsible parties.

Q: Will the ACM be replaced? With what?

A: EPA will replace the ACM with a similar, but non-hazardous material such as crushed limestone. (No concrete paving is planned, however)

Q: I think I may have health problems from asbestos. What should I do?

A: Health problems from asbestos typically occur after a long period of exposure, mostly breathing in asbestos dust. Most cases involve people who have worked around high levels of asbestos for a number of years. However, if you feel that you may have asbestos-related health problems, you should contact the Louisiana Office of Public Health at (504) 568-8537, or your family doctor.

Q: Will property owners be compensated for having ACM in their yards?

A: No. EPA will remove the ACM and replace it with crushed limestone or some other similar material, but no one will be otherwise compensated.

Q: Didn't EPA evaluate the Westbank Asbestos site for proposal to the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) proposal before?

A: EPA evaluated the area for NPL proposal in 1989-90. At that time, the HRS did not consider the soil exposure pathway. Even though the HRS now does consider the soil pathway, EPA expects that the removal action will fully address the problem. In addition, the removal action will clean up the area more quickly than the regular Superfund process, which often requires several years due to regulatory requirements.

Q: Is the NPL potential of a site indicative of unacceptable risk to the public?

A: Not necessarily. NPL assessment does not include risk considerations. The NPL process only identifies sites for further study consideration and/or assessment, in the form of Risk Assessments, Remedial Investigations, Feasibility Studies, etc.

Q: Why is EPA working to remove the ACM so quickly? Why is the work being done under EPA's removal authority and not as a Superfund remedial action?

A: At several Westbank locations, the ACM has now become unstable (as compared to EPA's investigations 6 years ago). This trend would just continue over time if EPA re-evaluated the site for possible proposal to its Superfund site list, thus creating a greater risk of asbestos release to the environment. Since the ACM already poses a health threat and the threat will increase over time, a removal action is needed now to best protect human health and the environment.

Q: The EPA fact sheet says that the ACM poses an "immediate threat to public health, but the ATSDR/LOPH fact sheet says the ACM is not a threat if it is not disturbed. This seems inconsistent...which is correct?

A: If the ACM is accessible to the public, then it can be disturbed by mowing activities, wheel traffic, foot traffic, etc., thus posing a potential health threat. The ACM does not currently pose an imminent health threat, but a removal action is necessary before further ACM deterioration takes place.

Q: Should parents be alarmed about the ACM around the schools/playgrounds and in their yards where children play?

A: Parents should not be alarmed, but should caution children not to play on or with the ACM. The most dangerous route of exposure for asbestos is through inhalation of airborne asbestos dust. Since most of the ACM is still relatively stable and due to the high humidity in the area (which reduces dust levels), precautions such as avoiding contact with the material and minimizing mechanical disturbance (mowing, wheel and foot traffic, etc.) are generally sufficient protective measures for children. Once EPA removes the material, all risk is eliminated.

Q: What will happen in 30 years to me or my child or we have ACM on our property?

A: In residential settings, frequent, repeated exposure to asbestos dust is rare. Most asbestos-related health problems typically occur after repeated exposure and inhalation of relatively high levels of asbestos particles (usually in industrial settings). Air monitoring over the past few years in the Westbank area has not shown any asbestos at levels that would prompt health concerns by either Federal or State health agencies. As such, EPA does not expect anyone with ACM on their property to have health effects directly related to the ACM as long as the material is not disturbed and is avoided until the removal is complete.

Q: What if I didn't receive an access agreement from EPA (i.e., one of the 600 locations already identified with ACM), but I think I have ACM on my property?

A: Be sure to tell EPA, LDEQ or LOPH if you think you have ACM on your property, and they will visit you to obtain an access agreement and investigate further. If it is confirmed that you have ACM on your property, EPA will remove it.

Q: How do residents contact someone if they have questions or wish to report suspected ACM?

A: They should call the local EPA outreach office at (504) 363-4917, or call 1-800-533-3508. Someone will help them at that time, or if everyone is busy the caller should leave a message and someone will call them back right away. Residents should not attempt to test or remove the suspected ACM material themselves.

Q: I received a blank "access agreement" from EPA. What should I do with it? What happens if I don't sign it?

A: After signing the access agreement, property owners may

- 1) bring the agreement to one of the community meetings hosted by EPA or LDEQ and give it to one of the agencies' staff;
- 2) wait until an EPA representative or an EPA contractor visits your property to answer questions and discuss concerns; or,
- 3) mail your signed agreement to:

John Martin
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1445 Ross Ave. #1200
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EPA needs to gather specific information about each ACM location along with the property owner's access consent before having its contractor do any work on a specific location. **THE EPA WILL NOT REMOVE THE ACM FROM A PROPERTY DURING THIS ACTION WITHOUT THE OWNER'S CONSENT!!**